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ABSTRACT

Migrant farmworkers suffer from low wages, seasonal work, unemployment, limited coverage under labor legislation, health and housing needs, low skill levels, and undereducation. These are further complicated by their high mobility and, in many instances, by language and cultural differences. Prior to 1962, no significant legislation or programs existed for improving the conditions of migrant farmworkers or for providing opportunities to them and their families. Since 1962, migrant education programs have achieved significant development toward resolving these problems (i.e., Migrant Student Record Transfer System; coordination and cooperation between states in the three major migrant streams; interagency efforts to deal cooperatively with migrant education programs; and development of such programs as Florida's Learn and Earn and the High School Equivalency Program). However, migrant programs, like their clientele, have always had to fight for survival. Therefore, rather than allow program deterioration by indifference or elimination of programs by administrative fiat, Congress must re-examine policies and procedures which may unintentionally be impeding progress toward improving the migrant's conditions. The National Education Association is willing to work with Congress and other interested groups to determine the necessary adjustments required in legislation and policy that will insure full participation of migrant farmworkers in our system. (NQ)

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STATEMENT OF THE

NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

ON

MIGRANT EDUCATION

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURAL LABOR

OF THE

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND LABOR

PRESENTED BY

ROY O. FUENTES

DIRECTOR, MIGRANT PROJECT

NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

5 December 1975

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

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RC009141

Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, I am Roy Fuentes, Director of the Migrant Project for the National Education Association. The National Education Association represents some 1.7 million educators in the U.S.

Thank you, Chairman Ford and members of the Subcommittee, for the opportunity to express the National Education Association's concerns about the problems of migrant farmworkers and their children. These hearings also afford me the opportunity to personally commend you, Chairman Ford, for your genuine concern and leadership in finding solutions to the problems of migrant farmworkers. There is no question that migrant farmworkers need strong advocates in Congress.

As advocates for migrant farmworkers, we need to be cognizant of the differences between migrants and the general population. Legislation is written with the assumption that the population is stable. Permanent residency facilitates the citizen's access to benefits of the legislation. Migrant farmworkers are denied this access because of the highly mobile patterns demanded by their employment or because they have been specifically excluded from legislation, policy, and regulations at all levels of government.

The National Education Association joins you and others in working for one of America's most neglected populations, the migrant farmworkers. The National Education Association's support of migrant farmworkers was most recently articulated last July by the Representative Assembly, the Association's chief governing body, in Resolution 75-27, which states:

> "The National Education Association is concerned with the plight of migrant workers, particularly with the education of those migrant children who are pushed out of school because of the system's failure to provide needed educational opportunities.
>
> "The Association urges its local affiliates to negotiate provisions that will guarantee protection and full rights for teachers of migrant children.
>
> "The Association supports legislation to insure equal educational opportunities for migrant children, appropriate programs for migrant families, and the right of migrant workers to be represented in collective bargaining by an organization of their choice.
>
> "Mini-Corps, as defined by federal legislation,

should be instituted in every state that has migrant children in its school system."

As you know, Mr. Chairman, the problems of migrant farmworkers include low wages and seasonal work, unemployment, limited coverage under labor legislation, job displacement caused by mechanization in agriculture, low skill levels, undereducation, and critical health and housing needs. These problems are further complicated by the high mobility of this population and in many instances by language and cultural differences. In assisting a migrant family, all of these problems must be dealt with simultaneously. They cannot be permanently isolated from each other. They aggravate one another. The National Education Association is sympathetic to each of these problems. Our main concern, however, is equitable access to educational opportunities for every migrant child.

Prior to 1962 no significant legislation or programs existed for improving the conditions of migrant farmworkers or for providing opportunities to them and their families. While positive and encouraging steps have been taken since 1962, the amount of funds made available in relation to the total target population and the magnitude of their problems have limited the effectiveness of the programs.

There is, of course, much legislation that could and should be impacting the migrant farmworkers. However, studies and investigations repeatedly have shown that the benefits of legislation for the general and stable populations do not reach migrants and their families. In addition to being highly mobile, migrants are locked into the vicious cycle of poverty. Thus, while some progress has been made since 1962, the migrant farmworkers are still left with uncontrollable problems that produce frightening statistics.

Housing conditions for seasonal agricultural farmworkers have improved, but not enough. There are too many migrant farm labor camps without heat, adequate lighting or ventilation, plumbing or refrigeration. Living space is extremely limited, and in many cases square footage is less than that recommended by the American Prison Association for minimum cell space. In many instances one outside toilet facility serves 60 to 70 people.

Despite recent programs, the unmet health care needs of migrants remain critical. The migrant health program reaches only 10 percent of the population eligible for services. The infant mortality rate for migrants is 25 percent higher than the national average. Mortality rates for tuberculosis and other infectious diseases among migrants are 2.5 times the national rate, and for influenza and pneumonia the rate is 20 percent higher for migrants than it is for the general population. Parasitic, respiratory, and digestive system diseases are two to five times more prevalent among migrants than in the general population. Furthermore, doctors and other specialists have reiterated that poor housing of migrants is directly related to specific ailments and illnesses, e.g. diarrhea, dehydration, asthma, anemia, and meningitis. In addition, we find frequent safety hazards resulting in accidents, injuries, falls, and burns.

Estimates of the number of working children of migratory laborers run as high as 300,000. Half of this number may work as regular contributors to the incomes of their families. The average income of migrant farmworkers is below the established poverty level. The American Friends Service Committee maintains that the end result of child labor in agriculture on the industrialized farms is the same as that in the factory. Exhausted by too much work at too young an age, with too little food and too little rest, the child is deprived of a normal period of growth and education.

Educational opportunities are crucial in breaking out of the vicious migrant cycle. There are an estimated 800,000 migrant children in the United States. Quite obviously they do not yet receive the full benefits of education.

In a study conducted by Exotech Systems, Inc., Evaluation of The Impact of ESEA Title I Programs for Migrant Children of Migrant Agricultural Workers, it was found that:

* Migrant students fall behind their peers in grade level. The average migrant student is from six to eighteen months behind the expected grade level for the age group.
* Migrant students fall most markedly behind in both achievement and grade level in the third and fourth grades. Achievement levels of migrant children diverge markedly from the rest of the student population during the third

and fourth grades. Approximately three years are required for the average migrant student in California and Texas to move about one grade level in the third and fourth grades. Further study is necessary to determine why the third and fourth grades are so difficult for migrant students.

* Most migrant students drop out of school before the ninth grade. The average non-migrant student has a 96 percent chance of entering the ninth grade and an 80 percent chance of entering the twelfth grade. The migrant student has a 40 percent chance of entering the ninth grade and only an 11 percent chance of entering the twelfth grade. Yet more than 90 percent of 441 migrant students who were sampled expressed a desire to stay in school despite the academic and economic problems.

Mr. Chairman, I know that everyone from State Directors of migrant education to the migrant aides will admit that a great deal more has to be done before the migrant child receives unprejudiced treatment from our educational and governmental systems. I also know that migrant educators will bear their share of the blame and responsibility for shortcomings in the implementation of migrant education programs. Yet we would be remiss if we did not give proper credit for some excellent work being done by the migrant education programs. Let there be no doubt that State Directors of migrant education along with the Director and staff of the U. S. Office of Education/Migrant Branch have tackled and are beginning to come to grips with some insurmountable problems in the delivery of programs to migrant farmworkers and their families.

For some time now it has been obvious that no agency has sufficient manpower, funds or expertise to deal adequately with the multifaceted situation of migrant farmworkers. Furthermore, we have come to recognize that migrant farmworkers are a national population, trans-migrating and criss-crossing several county and state boundaries in search of employment. These two conditions are complicated by the fact that migrant farmworkers are deprived of economic and political resources. I think that most of us would agree that interagency and interstate coordination and cooperation are prerequisites for effectively impacting such complex conditions.

In an educational context the high mobility factor plays havoc on

the migrant child's education with regard to program continuity, record keeping and transmittal of scholastic and health information, and credit-transfer. The migrant education programs have achieved some very significant development towards resolving these problems.

While we can be critical of and impatient with the progress in migrant education, I for one must say that I am highly impressed by the Migrant Student Record Transfer System; by the coordination and co-operation between states in the three major migrant streams; by the development of a basic skills measurement in reading and math; by the experiment with interstate transfer of academic credits between the states of Washington and Texas; and by interagency efforts to deal cooperatively with migrant education programs. We should not overlook the fact that one of the first bilingual-bicultural components developed and incorporated for use was in migrant education programs. I am also encouraged by the development of such programs as the California Mini-Corps, in the area of teacher training, and Florida's Learn and Earn, in the area of vocational and career training. Finally, I want to recognize the genuine commitment and dedication that I have found in several individuals whom I have met at various levels in the migrant education program. They may not be in the majority, but I am optimistic that their numbers will increase because their enthusiasm, creativeness, and professionalism are exemplary and contagious.

In one respect the accomplishments of migrant educaton programs are more amazing than its failings. Migrant programs, like their clientele, have always had to fight for survival; such fighting drains valuable energies and resources. In essence we have said to them, "Dream grand designs." Then we buried them in some obscure corner of the bureaucracy. The migrant education program began in 1967; I was startled to learn that no specific rules and regulations exist for migrant education. Why is it that the Office of Education is only now, nine years into the program, proposing these rules and regulations? There can only be one answer, Mr. Chairman: there exists a good deal of indifference in the Office of Education toward migrant education, and teachers of migrant children have moved ahead in their efforts to equalize educational opportunities for migrant children. Let our criticisms be constructive and forward looking for the improvement in program delivery, rather than allowing program deterioration by indifference

or elimination of programs by administrative fiat.

We want to guard against deterioration of any migrant program as in the transfer of the High School Equivalency Program (HEP) and the College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP) from the former Office of Economic Opportunity to the Department of Labor. Both these programs will terminate at the end of the Fiscal Year because of the Department of Labor's emphasis on manpower programs rather than educational programs. The victims of adverse changes in policy are the clientele because services to them are disrupted or denied. In the case of HEP and CAMP, both programs received excellent evaluations by the Department of Labor at the time of their transfer, only to be stricken from DOL regulations shortly thereafter. Migrant students face enough crises without having to worry about what services and assistance will be available next fall. It would seem that the obvious solution to this particular problem would be to transfer HEP and CAMP from DOL to the Office of Education. I would urge that such a transfer be done as expeditiously as possible.

Congress was extremely wise in identifying migrant programs and addressing them through separate legislation. I previously pointed out the importance of recognizing the differences between migrants and the general population. These differences dictate the types of service and programs required to meet the needs of this special clientele. They demand a higher priority than they are presently receiving. They require greater access to the decision-making apparatus of federal and state governments so that migrant programs can address themselves more systematically to the unique problems of migrant farmworkers. A higher priority and greater access to the decision-making processes should help to accelerate the pace for bringing migrant farmworkers into full participation in our society.

The purpose of these hearings is to assess the present needs of migrants and to improve the delivery of migrant education programs. I submit the real issue is that Congress must re-examine policies and procedures which may unintentionally be impeding progress toward this critical goal. The end result of these hearings should be to maintain program identity and to increase educational opportunities for migrant children.

I am urging Congress to maintain program identity for migrant education and other migrant programs. I am also suggesting that appropriate and reasonable administrative changes be made to ensure direct input into the policy-making process by migrant programs. In regard to the Migrant Education Branch, I am suggesting that the Branch have direct access to the Office of the Commissioner. I do not envision that such reorganization would necessitate additional funds. Reorganization should increase the effectiveness of the migrant education program.

Mr. Chairman, the National Education Association believes that during these hearings Congress should find the means to:

* ensure the continued identity of migrant programs;
* provide direct access for the Migrant Education Branch to the Office of the Commissioner of Education;
* transfer the High School Equivalency Program (HEP) and the College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP) to the Office of Education;
* increase representation of migrant farmworkers in the setting of policy and the implementation of migrant programs.

The NEA is willing to work with Congress and other interested groups to determine the necessary adjustments required in legislation and policy that will insure full participation of migrant farmworkers in our system.